



SURVEY ON CONSUMER PROBLEMS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1980

First and final issue

INQUIRIES

Inquiries regarding these statistics may be made by telephoning Perth (09)323 5324, or by writing to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1-3 St George's Terrace, Perth, W.A. 6000.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Introduction

This publication contains information, collected in the 1980 State Supplementary Survey, on consumer problems experienced by households in Western Australia. The Survey was undertaken in conjunction with the monthly 'Labour Force Survey' during the two weeks commencing 6 October 1980.

Survey Methodology

2. The Survey is based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings (houses, flats, etc) and non-private dwellings (hotels, motels, caravan parks, etc) and covers about 1.1 per cent of the population of Western Australia. Excluded from the Survey were such special dwellings as hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and reformatories.

3. The Survey information was obtained by personal interview of a responsible adult in each of the selected households. Information requested related to consumer problems experienced by members of each household during the period October 1979 to the day of the interview.

4. Using this survey methodology of approaching one respondent from each selected household, the number of consumer problems will be underestimated owing to:

- a The problem of recall of consumer problems over a twelve month period, and
- b The respondent's possible lack of awareness of every problem experienced by other members of the household.

Accordingly, as a result of this underestimation, the Survey information should not be interpreted as being a summary of all consumer problems experienced by households.

Scope

5. The Survey includes all persons except:

- a members of the Australian permanent defence forces.
- b certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments, customarily excluded from census and estimated populations.
- c overseas visitors holidaying in Australia.
- d members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependents) stationed in Australia.
- e patients in hospitals and sanatoria, boarding school students and inmates of gaols, reformatories, etc.

Definitions

6. A **consumer problem** was defined as any dissatisfaction experienced with buying or hiring goods, buying services, or renting accommodation. The definition was provided to each respondent in the form of a prompt card and included:

- i only those transactions that were for personal or domestic use.
- ii disputes with government departments from which a good or service had been purchased (eg Telecom, State Energy Commission).

iii both resolved and unresolved problems (it was not necessary for a consumer to have taken action to try to resolve the problem).

Excluded from the definition were:

- i problems related to the unavailability of goods, services, or accommodation.
- ii complaints about the general level of prices.
- iii disputes involving government departments from which a good or service has not been purchased (eg a dispute with the Taxation Department).

7. A **household** is defined as a group of people who live together as a single unit in the sense that they have common housekeeping arrangements, that is they have some common provision for food and the other essentials of living. Persons living in the same dwelling but having separate catering arrangements constitute a separate household. In addition, where a person or persons consider themselves a separate household, they are classified as such.

Expansion of Sample Data

8. The estimates contained in the following tables are derived by use of a complex ratio estimation procedure, which ensures that the survey estimates conform to an independently estimated distribution of the population by age and sex, rather than to the age and sex distribution within the sample itself.

Reliability of the estimates

9. Two types of error are possible in an estimate based on a sample survey: sampling error and non-sampling error. The sampling error is a measure of the variability that occurs by chance because a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed. Since the estimates in this publication are based on information obtained from occupants of a sample of dwellings the estimates derived from them are subject to sampling variability; that is, they may differ from the figures that would have been produced if all dwellings had been included in the survey.

10. One measure of the likely difference is given by the standard error, which indicates the extent to which an estimate might have varied by chance because only a sample of dwellings was included. There are about two chances in three that a sample estimate will differ by less than one standard error from the figure that would have been obtained if all dwellings had been included, and about nineteen chances in twenty that the differ-

ence will be less than two standard errors. The standard error can also be expressed as a percentage of the estimate, and this is known as the relative standard error.

11. The size of the standard error increases with the level of the estimate, so that the larger the estimate the larger the standard error. However, it should be noted that the larger the sample estimate the smaller will be the standard error in percentage terms. Thus, larger sample estimates will be relatively more reliable than smaller estimates.

Standard Errors of Estimates - Western Australia

Size of estimate	One standard error	Relative standard error (%)
2,500	510	20.4
3,000	560	18.7
3,500	590	16.9
4,000	630	15.8
4,500	660	14.7
5,000	690	13.8
6,000	750	12.5
10,000	920	9.2
20,000	1,200	6.0
50,000	1,700	3.4
100,000	2,100	2.1
200,000	2,600	1.3
300,000	2,900	1.0
500,000	3,300	0.7

12. As the standard errors in the table show, the smaller the estimate the higher is the relative standard error. Very small estimates are subject to such high standard errors (relative to the size of the estimate) as to detract seriously from their value for most reasonable uses. In the following tables estimates less than 2,600, that is with a standard error greater than 20%, have been replaced with an asterisk. Although figures for these small components can be derived by subtraction, they should not be regarded as reliable.

13. From the table above it can be seen that, for example, an estimate of 50,000 problems involving purchasing services has a standard error of 1,700. This means there are about two chances in three that the value that would have resulted if all dwellings had been included in the sample will be within the range 48,300 to 51,700 and nineteen chances in twenty that the value will be within the range 46,600 to 53,400.

14. The imprecision due to sampling variability, which is measured by the standard error, should not be confused with inaccuracies that may occur

because of imperfections in reporting by respondents, errors made in collection such as in recording and coding of data, and errors made in processing the data. Inaccuracies of this kind are referred to as the non-sampling error, and they may occur in any enumeration, whether it be a full count or only a sample. Every effort is made to reduce the non-sampling error to a minimum by careful design of questionnaires, intensive training and supervision of interviewers and efficient operating procedures.

Symbols and Other Usages

- nil or rounded to zero
- .. not applicable
- * subject to sampling variability, too high for most practical uses.

15. Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

W. M. BARTLETT

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9 October 1981



No. 1 - NUMBER OF CONSUMER PROBLEMS BY TYPE OF TRANSACTION

Transaction	Perth Statistical Division		Rest of State		Western Australia	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Purchase of goods	138.5	68	47.3	70	185.8	69
Hire of goods	2.8	1	*	*	3.0	1
Purchase of services	50.0	25	16.5	24	66.5	25
Rental accommodation	11.5	6	3.9	6	15.4	6
Total consumer problems	202.8	100	67.9	100	270.7	100

No. 2 - NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS WHICH REPORTED CONSUMER PROBLEMS

Households	Perth Statistical Division		Rest of State		Western Australia	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Reported one or more consumer problems	122.2	40	43.2	36	165.3	39
Reported no consumer problems	183.8	60	76.6	64	260.4	61
Total all households (a)	306.5	100	120.5	100	427.0	100

(a) Includes households where respondent did not know if any consumer problems were experienced.

No. 3 - CAUSES OF PROBLEMS INVOLVING THE PURCHASE OR HIRE OF GOODS AND SERVICES (a)

	Perth Statistical Division		Rest of State		Western Australia	
	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)
Total problems involving the purchase or hire of goods and services	191.3	..	64.1	..	255.3	..
Problems caused by -						
Price	14.2	7	5.4	8	19.6	8
Quality	156.5	82	50.7	79	207.2	81
Guarantee	4.6	2	3.7	6	8.2	3
Packaging/Labelling	5.9	3	*	*	8.3	3
Advertising/Sales methods	5.9	3	*	*	7.6	3
Safety of product	5.8	3	*	*	7.2	3
Delivery problems/Waiting time	9.8	5	5.9	9	15.6	6
Other (b)	11.2	6	*	*	12.7	5

(a) Percentages were obtained by expressing the number in each 'Problem caused by' category as a proportion of the total number of consumer problems involving the purchase or hire of goods and services. As a consumer problem may have more than one cause associated with it, the total of each per cent column will be greater than 100. (b) Includes cases where cause of problem unknown.

No. 4 - NUMBER OF PROBLEMS BY WHETHER ACTION TO RESOLVE WAS TAKEN

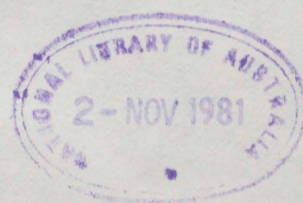
	Perth Statistical		Rest of State		Western Australia	
	Division					
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Action taken	151.5	75	49.9	73	201.4	74
No action taken	44.1	22	14.8	22	58.9	22
Undecided/Action yet to be taken	7.0	3	2.9	4	9.8	4
Total (a)	202.8	100	67.9	100	270.7	100

(a) Includes cases where it is not known whether action was taken or not.

No. 5 - TYPES OF SOLUTIONS TO CONSUMER PROBLEMS (a) (b)

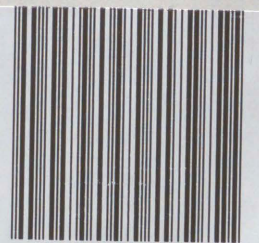
	Perth Statistical		Rest of State		Western Australia	
	Division					
	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)	Number ('000)	Per cent (a)
Total problems resolved	95.7	..	27.1	..	122.7	..
Type of solution -						
Item exchange or replacement	38.3	40	12.0	45	50.3	41
Item repair	17.1	18	6.2	23	23.3	19
Service fault correction	12.7	13	3.8	14	16.5	13
Full refund	11.3	12	*	*	13.1	11
Partial refund	3.7	4	*	*	4.4	4
Other	16.3	17	4.1	15	20.4	17

(a) Percentages were obtained by expressing the number in each 'Type of solution' category as a proportion of the total number of resolved consumer problems. As a consumer problem may have more than one type of solution associated with it, the total of each per cent column will be greater than 100. (b) Relates to all types of transactions; purchase and hire of goods and services, rental accommodation.



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